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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 011883

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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL ELECTION MONITORING IN PAKISTAN

REF: A) ISLAMABAD 9890 B) ISLAMABAD 10467

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR RYAN C. CROCKER; REASON 1.4 (G)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Effective monitoring is vital to strengthen the credibility of Pakistan's upcoming elections. Among other things, this requires strong coordination and a broadly international response. Multiple election monitoring initiatives involving many donors will waste scarce resources and lead to a duplication of effort. Now is the time to begin engaging with like-minded partners to ensure that election-related programs, including election monitoring and observation plans, are as streamlined, coordinated and cohesive as possible. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) Per reftels, post strongly believes that international observation of the upcoming Pakistan elections will be critical to ensuring a free and fair contest. During previous elections, including local contests in 2005, candidates routinely engaged in blatant violations of election laws and regulations during the voting process. These violations were perpetrated mostly by candidates and parties linked to the central government. Anecdotal evidence from the 2002 national and 2005 local elections suggests that violations were considerably higher in districts in which international observers were not present. Indeed, opposition parties are convinced that the presence of such observers prevented substantial fraud in certain Punjabi districts during the second round of voting in 2005.

¶3. (C) Domestic observation, which has been routine and widespread in Pakistani elections since the late 1980s, has demonstrated no similar deterrent effect. In addition, many civil society groups, including the traditional leader in this field, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, are closely aligned with a single party, undermining the credibility of such groups when it comes to election observation. Political parties and the Election Commission of Pakistan have consistently reiterated to post that a robust international observation effort is both desired and critical to provide parties and voters with confidence in the

process.

¶4. (U) Observation approaches to the next election should reflect an understanding of what worked and what did not work previously. A major problem in the past has been the scope and mandate of international election observation. Over the coming months, the international community needs to shape a monitoring effort that places teams under the auspices of a credible international organization in a significant number of representative districts. Security issues (especially in FATA and parts of the NWFP and Baluchistan) and the vast size of the Pakistan electorate (Punjab province alone has a larger population than Germany, while Sindh's population exceeds that of Spain or Poland) probably preclude universal coverage. However, credible coverage must be based on the fact that observers are available to cover wide areas of both rural and urban Pakistan. While teams would be organized by and under the auspices of international organizations, personnel in many cases would be from Pakistan.

¶5. (U) While most attention understandably focuses on the day of elections, approaches to observations also need to ensure that the nomination and campaign process is also monitored. In addition, efforts should be made to ensure an appropriate parallel vote tabulation (PVT) to supplement the observation. (Note: PVT is a forecast or verification of electoral results based on actual observation of the vote count in statistically significant, randomly selected polling places; it is also called "sample-based parallel vote tabulation" or "sample-based quick count," to distinguish it from "comprehensive parallel vote tabulation" or "comprehensive quick count" End Note). This will provide independent verification of the results and help prevent fraud through changing election results, a frequent point of contention between political parties.

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¶6. (U) Finally, any effective approach to election observation must be truly international. The worst thing would be for the U.S. alone to become too engaged or be seen as too far ahead of the rest of the international community. Indeed, the broader the international involvement, the more credible the observation effort - and, ultimately, the elections themselves. We should contribute to the election observation process and we should help shape that process. But our efforts and engagement should be as part of a broader effort that involves other donors and other countries. In this instance, the larger the donor pool, the better.

¶7. (C) From our perspective, a single, coordinated monitoring initiative that is truly international in scope would reduce duplication, ensure donors issue similar conclusions and prevent allegations that the USG is bent on manipulating results to favor any particular side. US-only observer missions are likely to face significant security and logistical challenges in addition to unpredictable political reactions locally. No single donor can or should bear the costs of the entire monitoring effort. Similarly, we should if at all possible avoid a proliferation of ad hoc, fragmented monitoring activities, each sponsored by different entities and each offering wildly different perspectives, based on individual observations in only a few areas of the country.

¶8. (U) The importance of coordination among counterparts and within the donor community cannot be stressed enough. Other donors are contributing significant funding (on the order of \$12 million) for election related training, including polling station staff and party workers. Election observation programs rank second as an area of donor interest. For this reason, the joint strategy covers areas not covered by other donors at this time, including preparing voter roles, providing some equipment and promoting engagement between the election commission and various political parties.

¶9. (U) Post has already expended considerable energy in working with the relevant donor working group in Islamabad to promote a coordinated approach, including in the area of election monitoring. From our perspective, the best scenario would be for all donors to participate jointly in an accepted framework rather than acting unilaterally. The next best approach would be to require that donor observers coordinate with and follow guidelines provided by the working group.

¶10. (U) We have not received a firm commitment from any donor on this issue so far. While some donors remain undecided about their plans for international monitoring, perhaps reflecting continued uncertainty about when elections will take place and how they will be managed, others are leaning towards efforts that exclusively involve their missions (e.g. the EU). While dialogue at post will continue, we strongly believe it is important to also initiate those discussions among like-minded donors and other international partners, both in their headquarters office and in their meetings in Washington. In particular, talking points provided below should be used when approaching key bilateral donors, including the UK, Canada, Australia, Japan, France, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Netherlands and Belgium as well as potential international donors such as the EU, UNDP and the Commonwealth.

¶11. (U) Suggested talking points aimed at pushing for a coordinated, streamlined and coherent approach to election monitoring follow below:

-- Upcoming Pakistan elections for national and provincial legislatures are a critical part of this nation's democratic transition. We have a shared interest in ensuring that these elections are free and fair and that the results are universally accepted by key political actors.

-- The United States is committed to providing considerable support for ensuring free and fair elections. With few exceptions, this will be executed through international

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non-governmental organizations and contractors.

-- Such support will help build confidence in the election process, both within opposition political parties and with the Pakistani population at large. A strong commitment to a significant monitoring effort covering the nomination, campaign and voting process, coupled with a parallel vote tabulation, will help minimize electoral fraud from any direction. It will also provide independent verification of the results.

-- An organized, coordinated international observation effort is vital. From our perspective, a truly international effort will ensure credibility across all sides of the Pakistan political perspective.

-- We have previously discussed with your mission in Islamabad the need to ensure that any international monitoring effort is closely coordinated, with the activities of one initiative not undermining or duplicating the activities of another. This is the only way to ensure widespread coverage and to avoid conflicts and contradictions in monitoring the elections, collecting data and assessing the results.

-- Ideally, all international donors could "buy" into a single, coordinated monitoring program. If this isn't possible, at a minimum we would request that all donors insist that their funding is coordinated jointly with and follows guidance from the donor working group on elections established within the Islamabad donor community. Such coordination is essential to ensure the effectiveness of the election-monitoring process.

-- The election date is fast approaching and significant

preparatory efforts will be critical to ensure effective international monitoring specially if it is to be combined with domestic monitoring and parallel vote tabulation. With this in mind, we request that you affirm your commitment to continuous coordination and a unified approach as the election process unfolds. This will in turn allow all donors to move forward together in finalizing approaches, selecting monitoring mechanisms and beginning substantive preparations.

CROCKER